

Tribute To J.R. Walkof

Through the ages, the world has been blessed and influenced for the good by many unselfish and hard working men and women. One outstanding such person in southern Manitoba was John R. Walkof.

He was born to Simon and Mariann Walkof in 1888. The Walkofs came to Canada from Romania in 1884 to live in Gretna. Here John R. spent his early years and received part of his elementary education. In 1899 the family moved to Hillside Farm, now Wakeham, 11 miles southwest of Morden. The main language used in the home was High German and church affiliation was of Baptist origin.

Upon finishing his grade nine in 1905, he began to teach in public schools in the area. Haskett as we know it now, was his first assignment.

On August 29, 1909, John R. married Justina Klassen from Altona. They moved to Winkler and later to a farm two miles east of Glencross School, so named because the Great Northern Railway crossed their farm from Morden to the U.S. A station and the McCabe elevator were also located on their farm.

After teaching in public schools in the region for 10 years, in 1915 Mr. Walkof accepted the Principalship of the Winkler High School. He continued there until 1940, having served as Principal and teacher for 25 years.

Since 1912 steps had been taken for a high school program in Winkler, but it was under J.R. Walkof's guidance that it materialized. During his years as Principal of the school at Winkler, he raised the status of the one-room high school to that of a Collegiate Department.

He was elected as President of the Rhineland-Stanley Teacher's Association 19 times, he pioneered Education Week, and organized summer school courses in Winkler for teachers to raise their academic standing.

During the school year, outside of school hours, Mr. Walkof spent his time in a small teacher's room over the stairway in the first brick school building. Mrs. Walkof would take him to school Monday morning then pick him up on Friday. Under his tutelage, school choirs, a literary society, brass band, boys and girls clubs and a grain show were all begun. When new Canadians came to the area in 1925, three evening classes a week were given for the instruction of the English language.

During World War II, Mr. Walkof wrote letters for young men who sought C.O. status, and he often accompanied parents when their sons had to appear before Judge Adams in Morden to establish what kind of alternative service they would be obliged to perform. To those fellows who chose to enlist in military service, he presented a framed token of appreciation on their return.

The Walkofs had four children, three girls and a boy and the development of Christian character was uppermost in the family's philosophy of life.

Later in his life, diabetes became a real challenge for Mr. Walkof. His wife cared for him at home until he passed away in 1965. Mrs. Walkof's health gradually declined as well and she died in 1982.

In the 1980's John R. Walkof was recognized posthumously with the naming of a school in his honor. The K-4 school on Southview Drive in Winkler is known as J.R. Walkof Elementary School.

Excerpts from an article by Justina Falk, edited by Deb Penner